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Steven Thompson

Avondale College of Higher Education, steve.thompson@ozemail.com.au

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18. Response to Bryan Ball's Biblical and Theological Chapters

Steven Thompson

Avondale Seminary

It is a privilege to offer a written response to the chapters on biblical and historical theology in this volume of essays by my one-time department chair, and long-time fellow theologian and personal friend, Bryan Ball. Reading (in most cases re-reading) his chapters has provided a refreshing heads-up from my usual focus on exegetical minutiae, to view several "big picture" biblical and theological concerns which remain perpetually at the centre of Christianity.

Chapter 2 "Revelation and the Authority of Scripture"

Chapter 2 argues the inadequacy of the "encounter" view of the doctrine of divine revelation, and offers a view that accounts more adequately for the evidence available in Scripture itself. While it is customary to combine study of the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of biblical inspiration, the two are treated separately by Ball, with the doctrine of inspiration being the topic of chapter 5, "The Sufficiency of Scripture".

After an opening look at the enduring "crisis" (p. 14) in understanding the doctrine of revelation, he poses his key question: "Do words, spoken or written, play any part in the revelatory process" (p. 18). He answers by putting forward a case for "Special Revelation as Rational Proposition" (p. 26). In other words, the Bible reveals the will of God for his people, not only by encounter, but also through logical, rational content.

After briefly sketching the history of the doctrine from the New Testament church to the present, Ball concludes by highlighting the need for Christians to recognise and reaffirm that divine revelation includes rational, logical content which can be stated in propositions. Readers of Scripture encounter not only God himself, but also God's will expressed through *logos* and *ethos*, to guide and instruct the willing reader. Only thus can we resist the damage done by humanism and liberalism to our confidence that we can know God's will through his Word, the Scriptures.

Significant Old Testament evidence could have been cited to strengthen his thesis, such as the Hebrew verb *gālāh* and its Aramaic equivalent *g'lāh*,

“to reveal”, which together occur more than 25 times in the Old Testament in reference to God’s revelation of himself, including specific information, to his people. This word is especially prominent in connection with king Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel chapter 2 (cited by Ball), where it occurs seven times, a significant number. Another common Hebrew formula for “revelation” is “word of the LORD” which in its 270 occurrences distributed widely through the Old Testament clearly includes propositional content.¹ In the New Testament, “word of God”, employing Greek *logos*, occurs more than 40 times. The main definition of *logos* in the standard New Testament Greek lexicon is: “a communication whereby the mind finds expression.”² In other words, the “mind of God” (if one can speak of God in such anthropological fashion) expresses itself to the mind of humans. This is certainly more “*logos*-enriched” than even the most awe-inspiring “encounter”—it is the language of “rational proposition”. Ball’s thesis is clearly supported by the biblical evidence. While “encounter” is a component of divine revelation in Scripture, God’s *logos* and *ethos* are at the heart of Scripture.

Chapter 3 “The Birth of the English Bible”

On the Day of Pentecost, the “birthday” of Christianity, it became clear that the Christian proclamation should not be restricted to a single “sacred” language, but was to be available to “every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born” (Acts 2:8, KJV). In continuation of this precedent, the Bible has become available in the languages of many of the world’s people. The clear but unstated aim of this chapter is to trace the birth and the first 300 years of the history of the Bible in English, plus a brief sketch of history of the Bible in Anglo-Saxon from about 700 CE.

What happens to a Christian society which is denied access to the Bible for a considerable period of time? Ball’s brief answer is “ignorance and corruption” among both laity and clergy. A major cure for both, in the British Isles, was to make Scripture available in the language of the people, a dangerous mission undertaken successfully by John Wycliffe, and which produced the Bible translation named for him. Very recent scholarship indicates the so-called “Wycliffite Bible” was even more popular and more widely available to English readers than believed in sources Ball cited.³

1 The less frequent phrase “Word of God” carries the same meaning.

2 F. W. Danker, editor, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), λόγος.

3 Scholarship on the Wycliffe Bible has experienced considerable recent advancement, summarized by Laura Light in her review of Kathleen Kennedy, *The Courtly and Commercial Art of the Wycliffite Bible* in *The Medieval Review* 15.05.35 (downloaded 29 May 2015 from [tmrl=Indiana.edu@mail16.atl91.mcsv](http://tmrl.indiana.edu@mail16.atl91.mcsv)).

The Protestant Reformation was aided by a revolution in communication spurred on by the invention of printing by moveable type. This greatly accelerated the pace of Bible translation, and increased the demand of readers for the Bible in their own language. "When it pleased God to move King James to that excellent work, the translation of the Bible..."⁴ With these words, the seventeenth-century biographer Anthony Walker began his account of the work of John Bois, the only translator of the KJV whose personal recollections and diary provide first-hand insight into the work which went into the translation and production of this most influential of English versions.

Ball closes by cautioning against attempts to enthrone any one translation as "the" correct and final form of God's Word. He does so, first, by sketching the history of revisions of the KJV. He could have informed readers that they do not have access to the KJV of 1611, but the KJV as it had been revised several times, including the major revision in 1769, which among other things, increased the number of personal pronouns such as "thee", "thou", "thine", "ye" in the text! Ball endorses the use of contemporary Bible translations, but does not mention that their multiplication is no longer justified by changes to the English language, or even by increasing knowledge of the Bible's original languages, but by the hope of publishers to score a best-seller!⁵

Chapter 4 "The Enduring Influence of the Authorised Version"

Chapter 4 continues charting the impact of the Authorised King James Version of the Bible, not only on English-language Christianity but also on the English language itself.⁶ Just as Martin Luther's Bible translation helped standardize the German language, so the KJV helped standardize English. Its impact on literature, art, education and civilization in general would be hard to over-estimate. The single most poignant image capturing its vast and

net). She opens her review by declaring "There were probably more bibles copied in the vernacular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than there were Bibles copied in Latin."

4 Anthony Walker, *Life of John Bois*, chap 5, par 6, cited in Ward Allen, *Translating for King James* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 139. Bois's own notes on the process of translation constitute another valuable part of this publication.

5 For an evaluation of recent translations, see Lorinda Bruce and Steven Thompson, "Does it Really Matter? Choosing a Bible Translation for Schools" *Teach Journal of Christian Education* 7 (2013): 34-41.

6 This chapter depends mainly on McGrath, Scroggie and Bragg. Another, more recent and comprehensive collection of essays on the KJV is by Philip H. Towner, David G. Burke and John F. Kutsko, editors. *The King James Version at 400: Assessing Its Genius as Bible Translation and Its Literary Influence* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

varied impact, to this writer's mind, is that of the young Abraham Lincoln reading his family's treasured copy by flickering firelight in an isolated Kentucky log cabin, storing up its message and values for that future time when he could make his mark on civilization.

The KJV has also had an impact on entertainment, especially in the United States. One thinks for example of Fulton Oursler's 1949 book, *The Greatest Story Ever Told: A Tale of the Greatest Life Ever Lived*, which became the basis of the 1965 movie of the same title.⁷ Earlier Hollywood Bible-influenced productions include *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and *Ben Hur* (1959). In these and other movies, KJV-redolent language and imagery have impacted viewers.

But the Bible is more than a source of great stories; it is a great, inspiring, challenging and character-forming story, the greatest ever told. Ball appeals to readers to "cherish, defend, promulgate and exemplify the values and ideals of this quite amazing book..." (p. 64). He then concludes with an unexpected and foreboding reference to the decline and collapse of western culture, probably to prepare readers for chapter 16.

Chapter 5 "The Sufficiency of Scripture."

Chapter 5 addresses a question that has faced Christians of all ages—deciding the valid source of religious authority and Christian duty. Ball at the outset declares what he takes to be the correct reply, and warns the Christian reader against "the danger... of assigning authority to the establishment rather than to Scripture" (p. 68). He aims to defend the Bible as the supreme authority for Christian doctrine and life. He starts with what he considers a defining characteristic of Puritanism: to discover, understand and adhere to the "real" meaning of Scripture, and to let it instruct the life.

Major topics include Scripture's inspiration, purpose and authority. Ball highlights the importance of recognizing the bi-level nature of Scripture's authority: on one hand, authority for the church in her formulation of doctrine; on the other hand, authority for the individual believer's faith and life—one's "duty" according to seventeenth-century Puritan divines. Correct methods of studying Scripture lead to correct understand of God's will, and prevent misunderstanding of the plan of salvation caused by uninformed tradition and by the speculative philosophy that creeps in when Christian belief is not properly based on Scripture.

Ball summarises classic arguments for Scripture's inspiration: its survival in face of attack and neglect; its accessibility to the honest reader, who can discern its inspiration through its unity of theme, overall message, internal agreement on its central themes, fulfilled prophecy, and especially

⁷ Doubleday, 1949.

through its accounts of the life of Christ, and its continuing source of life-changing power.

What is known today as “verbal inspiration” was considered, but rejected, by leading Puritan divines. They distinguished between the *words* of Scripture recorded by “God’s penmen” (one of their preferred expressions) on the one hand, and the *substance* and *matter* of Scripture on the other, which is the plan of salvation.⁸

The chief points of the Puritan doctrine of Scripture are central to Ball’s goal for this chapter. Scripture’s main purpose is to lead people to Christ and to salvation in Him. It is therefore the responsibility of all believers to read and seek to understand Scripture for themselves, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that inspired Scripture’s authors will guide the seeking reader to a knowledge of salvation. A necessary component of the individual’s understanding of Scripture is reason. Obstacles to rightly understanding Scripture include prejudice, previously held opinions, the grip of tradition, and the long reach of ancient Greek speculative philosophy, still obvious and influential during the Puritan epoch. Although he does not explicitly state it, Ball implies, on the chapter’s final page, that the Puritan sense of living in the last days was a contributing factor to their understanding of Scripture.

This theologically concentrated essay at the heart of this volume concludes with a too-brief section on “Progressive revelation” (pp. 83–5), a belief close to the theological heart of several Puritan divines. It is an important topic, but seems better suited to chapter 2.

Chapter 6 “The Origins of Genesis Reconsidered”

Nearly 80 years ago a bold and original theory of the compilation of the book of Genesis was put forward, based almost exclusively on first-hand literary evidence which was then coming to light as a result of archaeological discoveries. If accepted, it would cut directly across the path of the so-called “Documentary Hypothesis” for the origin of the Pentateuch, which dominated biblical scholarship at the time. Ball introduces this remarkable theory through the experience of its main proponent, P. J. Wiseman, supported more recently by his son the Orientalist D.J. Wiseman, and the Old Testament scholar R.K. Harrison.

Attributing the authorship of Genesis to a single person, traditionally Moses, has problems: how could the records have been preserved accurately by memory? A bigger problem emerged for those with a high view of the inspiration of Scripture in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when critical biblical scholars developed the Documentary Hypothesis. They argued

⁸ The author’s point in this paragraph could have been supported by reference to A.T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Inspiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), especially 114–122.

that Genesis as we know it was the product of an editor working a thousand years after the time of Moses, who drew on sources which preserved diverse and sometimes contradictory accounts of origins and of the patriarchs.

The crucial question prompting the quest for the origin of Genesis is whether today's Bible readers can rely on the authenticity of its narratives. Are they based on actual records from the time of Moses and before? Or were those narratives the product of long periods of oral transmission which had become fictionalised in the process, and which were extracted from different and sometimes contradictory earlier sources?

Wiseman began his defence of the antiquity and therefore reliability of Genesis by highlighting the antiquity of the high civilizations of the Near East, including the antiquity of their literary conventions and traditions, which survive in the huge quantity of documents, many written in cuneiform script on baked clay tablets. Since many of these date to the time assigned by historians to Moses, they provide contemporary, reliable, first-hand insight into his times.

Wiseman theorised that much of Genesis was originally written in cuneiform, on clay tablets, following literary conventions of the time (p. 97). As evidence he cited the occurrence of Babylonian vocabulary in the Hebrew of chapters 1–11, the Egyptian flavour of chapters dealing with the Israelites in Egypt, later (possibly Mosaic) glosses in Genesis explaining place names which had already become redundant by the time of Moses, and finally, so-called "catch-lines" which open and close the genealogies of Genesis, and which originally would have "joined" the source tablets used by Moses.

While Wiseman did not argue that Moses actually composed all of Genesis, he made a case for him as its compiler, using records which had been preserved, most likely in cuneiform writing, by previous generations. The strength of Wiseman's hypothesis lies in its locating of Genesis in the world dominated by Babylon and Egypt during the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, something that the Documentary Hypothesis, dating the composition of Genesis nearly a thousand years later, failed to do.

One objection raised against Wiseman's hypothesis centres on the so-called *toledot* passages, or genealogies, of Genesis. There are eleven of them, and they seem to come at the beginning of relevant sections of Genesis, rather than at their conclusion, as they do in ancient cuneiform documents. The clear exception to this is the first *toledot*, Gen 2:4a, which refers to what has gone before. While the Wiseman hypothesis removes the need for the Documentary Hypothesis, and makes a clear case for a single compiler, it does not specify that Moses was that compiler. It does however point to the time of Moses as the most likely date of compilation for Genesis.⁹

9 Reference to the "early Hebrew scholar Gesenius" (p. 99) needs supple-

Chapter 12 "Righteousness and Redemption in the Epistles of Paul"

This chapter opens with a recognition of the impact of the life and work of Australian theologian Leon Morris, and an acknowledgement of Ball's dependence, for this chapter, on Morris's well-known book *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. The key question is the meaning of "righteousness" in the Pauline epistles. There is no New Testament word more central to the Gospel, more loaded with potential for misunderstanding, and whose meaning is more contested than "righteousness." This chapter wades into this charged topic with Ball's usual focus on the identify and pursuit of a core Christian concept. Ball develops seven propositions which, taken together, explain and expound the legal as well as the moral aspects of what he repeatedly terms God's "redemptive righteousness":

- 1) Redemptive righteousness, because it is rooted in God, has a moral aspect. He is "fair and just, good, holy and perfect" (pp. 196, 197);
- 2) It responds to human sin, enabling humans to comprehend their sinfulness in its light;
- 3) It is revealed in the life and in the death of Jesus;
- 4) It is received by faith which, according to Paul, is ongoing: "from faith to faith" (Rom 1:17). It is also relational: trusting, believing, dependent, submissive;
- 5) It is realised in justification. Justification by faith is the core Protestant term which indicates the believer's initial, unearned "change of status" before God, which is made possible by commitment to Christ. The technical term "imputed righteousness" expresses this initial redemption by faith in God's righteousness;
- 6) It is recognisable (under its more familiar labels "imparted righteousness" or "sanctification") through the visible changes to a believer's life resulting from God's presence through the Holy Spirit;
- 7) Finally, it is reaffirmed by hope. Righteousness has an eschatological dimension, the anticipation of the splendour and wonder of the future redeemed life awaiting all who remain faithful.

It is hard to fault this fluent and well-rounded treatment of New Testament righteousness. However, the chapter does not develop the term "redemptive", even though the word occurs eleven times, and "redemption" occurs ten times. The concept and practice of redemption, as understood by Paul and his early readers, would contribute another significant component to our understanding of the all-important concept of righteousness.

menting. Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842) was probably his generation's most prominent specialist in ancient Near Eastern languages and literature. His Hebrew lexicon provided the lasting foundation for subsequent biblical Hebrew lexicons.

Chapter 13 "The Nature of Biblical Eschatology"

In this chapter Ball challenges Christians to achieve and maintain balance in understanding biblical eschatology, first by giving balanced attention to the eschatology of both Testaments, and second, by recognizing the place of eschatology in God's redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ, God's "eschatological man" (p. 208). Christians have struggled repeatedly to achieve and maintain the balance and wholeness called for in this chapter, which outlines five crucial truths about biblical eschatology that must be in place in order to achieve the essential balance. First, true biblical eschatology is Christ-centred, not just tacked on to the end. Second, eschatology's Christ-centredness requires recognition that "the last days" of the New Testament began at Christ's first coming, so our present age is already in some sense part of the eschaton. Third, Ball advocates the acceptance of what he terms a "moderate historicism" and "responsible historicist interpretation of prophetic chronology" (p. 223), especially when interpreting Daniel and Revelation.¹⁰ Fourth, there is an ethical dimension to biblical eschatology, calling for what Ball terms "eschatological living" (p. 224). "Eschatological living" is not a requirement in order to be ready to enter the kingdom at some future date; it is part of current life in the kingdom. Biblical eschatology's fifth and final component is mission. "Preach!" "witness!" "proclaim!" are key New Testament terms expressing what Christians do with their Christ-given eschatological message.

Ball concludes with two challenges that face the church. The first is for the church not to repeat its past mistake of identifying itself with the kingdom. The church is not the kingdom, and does not produce the kingdom; rather, the kingdom produces the church! The second is for the church to develop and proclaim the element of hope at the heart of biblical eschatology to a world where hope is in short supply.

Chapter 15 "Sixteenth-Century Continental Conditionalists"

What happens to the human person at death? Behind this question is the more fundamental one, what is human nature? What are the human's constituent components? Matter only? Spirit only? Or a uniting of matter and spirit? Once this question is settled, a more insistent and personal one immediately emerges: what, if anything, survives death? Ball's knowledge of the

10 Historicism, as developed and applied to the biblical apocalypses, differs from that used by social critics such as Karl Popper in his *The Poverty of Historicism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960). For a summary of biblical historicism see William Johnsson, "Apocalyptic" in Raoul Dederen, editor. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 784-814.

Christian debate surrounding this topic becomes evident; he has published a monograph on it.¹¹ His findings in this chapter are therefore a significant, original contribution towards the solution of an issue which has long divided Christians.

The question whether an eternally living soul is housed in a material body was pivotal to the Protestant Reformation, which included a reaction against the fairly recently developed doctrine of purgatory, official Roman Catholic dogma only since 1439 CE. Many readers will be surprised to learn that Luther believed the human soul to be mortal. This belief prompted his abhorrence of, and strong reaction against, the sale of indulgences which, it was claimed, would shorten the time that the conscious souls of the dead would suffer in purgatory. Calvin on the other hand was committed to the doctrine of an immortal soul. This strongly held doctrinal position on this issue contributed to his willingness to authorise the execution of Servetus for heresy, a fact that has escaped the attention of several recent treatments of Calvin, but revealed by Ball's research.

The close connection between the doctrine of soul sleep/mortalism and belief in the imminent return of Christ is another striking feature disclosed in this chapter. This connection was demonstrated especially in the case of Servetus, whose theology embraced and integrated both beliefs.

The question of the presence or absence of conscious awareness in death has emerged very recently in response to what has become a stream of books from evangelical Christian publishers recounting what has become termed "heavenly tourism"; accounts of journeys to heaven by those who have recovered from a near-death experience. Perhaps the best known is *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*.¹² At the book's heart is six year-old Alex Malarkey's account of what he experienced as the result of a terrible automobile collision. A decade after his accident and four years after the publication of his book, Alex confessed in an open letter "I did not die. I did not go to Heaven."¹³ This has refocused Christian attention on the meaning of the biblical concept of "resurrection" and the biblical position on the state of persons in death. There is hope that Alex's confession will lead Christians back to the biblical position on the state of the person in death, and its accompanying belief in the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return.

11 Bryan W. Ball, *The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley*. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2008.

12 The subtitle is telling: *A remarkable account of miracles, angels, and life beyond this world*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010.

13 Alex Malarkey, "An Open Letter to Lifeway and Other Sellers, Buyers, and Marketers of Heaven Tourism, by the Boy Who Did Not Come Back From Heaven." (Downloaded 8 May 2015 from <http://pulpitandpen.org/2015/01/13/the-boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-recants-story-rebukes-christian-retailers/>)

Chapter 16 "The Decline of the West: Myth, or Reason for Hope?"

The hypothesis of progress has been a centrepiece of the long-standing western humanist and enlightenment assumption that human beings, and with them human society, are on an evolutionary "up escalator" to even more-highly evolved persons, and ever higher civilization.¹⁴ Although expressed at least since the time of Plato (427–347 BCE), this evolutionary view has been a prominent component of western humanism for the past five hundred years. Recently it has encountered major ideological competition in the form of an opposing "down escalator" hypothesis that western society is not ascending at all, but descending into decline and decay. Articulated prominently early in the twentieth century by Oswald Spengler, this theme of western decline has been taken over and updated by John Carroll.¹⁵ Is Western civilization "going up" or "going down"? In either case, what comes next?¹⁶

What should be the attitude of Christians to the announcement of western civilization's decline? Rejoicing? Welcoming? Lamenting? Working to counter it? This question is addressed only briefly by Ball. He does not call for Christian activism of the type done, for example, by Jim Wallis and his Sojourner movement, who engage socially and politically to "hold back the winds of strife" by efforts to repair western society. Nor does he advocate isolation and withdrawal into sheltered Christian communes to await the end.

Ball enters this complex debate only far enough to explore a single facet, the decline of western Christianity. While the validity of the hypothesis of declining Western civilization can be debated, the decline of western Christianity and its impact on society is easily documented. It was already detected in nineteenth-century literature by J. Hillis Miller in his *The Disappearance of God*.¹⁷ Ball's main authorities include John Carroll and Francis Schaeffer, plus more recent proponents of declining western Christian influence, which

14 The analogy between the popular notion of ever-advancing evolutionary progress and an "up escalator" comes from Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*. Rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 33–39.

15 *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture*. London: Fontana, 1993. Carroll's view, but not his basic thesis, has been modified in subsequent revisions of this book in 2004 and 2010, which are titled *The Wreck of Human Culture: Humanism Revisited*.

16 The debate was summarized by Raymond Tallis, *Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism*. New York: St Martin's, 1997. His fundamental thesis is that "the [Enlightenment] hope of progress is well founded..." (p. 64).

17 J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five 19th-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963; revised edition New York: Schocken, 1965).

it is said is due largely to the humanistic shouldering-aside of Christianity and exaltation of post-Christian humanity.

Ball concludes with a very brief call for renewed attention to the biblical apocalypses, especially chapters 2 and 7 of Daniel. A reminder of the main assumptions of biblical apocalyptic would have improved the chapter at this point, William Johnsson's seven-point summary of biblical apocalyptic's core assumptions come to mind: God is sovereign over this world; He has genuine foreknowledge; apocalyptic visions/prophecies have a cosmic sweep rather than a focus on Israel; biblical covenant echoes are absent from apocalyptic narratives; predicted epochs extend through time, and are continuous, covering all of earthly history; in the future divine intervention will break into this world from outside and in total independence of earthly processes.¹⁸

The contentious issue of the present state and future fate of western civilization is not easy to address in a single essay, but Ball provides what he acknowledges is a "sombre and sobering analysis of our culture" (p. 288) which demands that Christians take a fresh look at what can be learned about our times, and our future, in light of Scripture's apocalyptic visions.

Chapter 17 "Jesus and the Great Commission"

Ball appropriately concludes this collection of essays with an exposition of the Gospel Commission. Following brief exegesis of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' commissioning his disciples, the chapter takes up three questions: what does the Great Commission mean? Who is included in it? How will it be accomplished?

The Commission was first delivered to those who witnessed Christ's ministry and resurrection, making them irreplaceable. Christ, not the church, must remain the subject of all Christian witness. Church and kingdom are not identical. The church is a valid part of the kingdom only when it exists to further that kingdom. Ball cites a range of leading thinkers on church and mission in support of this church-to-kingdom relationship. For the second time in this volume Ball reminds readers that "this kingdom" which Christ spoke about in the Gospel Commission is already present, as it has been with his followers since his resurrection.

Responsibility for mission rests "with all who are disciples of Jesus" (p. 298). A truly balanced witness to Christ demands that his followers live a "persuasive lifestyle" (p. 300) and demonstrate "social responsibility" (p. 301). A major burden of Ball is the challenge of carrying out mission "at home" in post-Christian societies. He points to the tendency in many churches towards a "nurture-mission" (im)balance in favour of nurture. He

18 William Johnsson, "Apocalyptic", 790, 795-99.

closes by sketching the essential role of the Holy Spirit in carrying out the Gospel Commission.

Ball repeats the importance and centrality of the concrete, historical, objective facts about the Jesus of Nazareth, including his crucifixion and resurrection, as the content of today's Christian witness (pp. 292, 299, 303), but he could develop more the importance of sharing also one's personal, subjective experience of the risen Christ as part of the individual believer's witness—in the words of hymn writer Fanny Crosby, "this is *my* story, this is *my* song, praising *my* Saviour all the day long."

If this chapter were to be written today, one would expect reference to the impact of megachurches on witness and evangelism. Their growing presence and influence would also be acknowledged and dealt with in exploring the role of the Holy Spirit in witness. Many megachurches have emerged from the Assemblies of God and similar Pentecostal denominations, which have their own distinctive understanding of the reception of the Holy Spirit.

There is need today to acknowledge postmodernity's distrust of metanarratives, including the Christian metanarrative of salvation history. How can witness and evangelism best be conducted among postmoderns who prefer the personal above the institutional, the local above the national, the immediate above the future? These criticisms do not detract from the chapter's powerful encouragement for every Christian disciple first to understand the Gospel Commission—its source, its components, its goals, and its empowering by the Holy Spirit. And with that understanding, to *go* on the mission that Christ assigns, whether across the world or across the street, to hearts and minds that are open to the message of salvation through Christ.